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ABSTRACT

Most studies of gender roles in India have emphasized the subordinate roles of women, especially in comparison to the women in the United States. In contrast, the traditional dominant role of Indian women in the domestic aspects of family has not received as much attention. The present study compared the attitudes of college students in the United States and in South India toward the traditional roles of women, men, and children. The Historic-Socio-Cultural Premises Scale was administered to 21 male and 20 female college students in India and to 30 male and 35 female college students in the United States. Results indicated that although students in India, in general, held more traditional views than did students in the United States, the findings also reflected the dominance of Indian women within the domestic sphere in that they demand their children's obedience. On the other hand, the difference between men and women in India with regard to female chastity was the most significant finding. Even though women in India expressed the most traditional views regarding obedience in children, they expressed less traditional values than did men with regard to chastity. This may be because cultural concerns with female chastity in India have placed the woman in a weak and docile position, while the man in the traditional setting occupies the superior status of the "protector." It should be noted, however, that there are extreme regional and economic diversities between Northern and Southern India and obvious class differences among the population as a whole; hence further studies would be required to take these differences into account. (ABL)

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Gender Roles, Obedience, and Chastity in India and the United States

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Abstract

College students in India (41) and in the United States (65) completed the HSCP scale (Diaz-Guerrro, 1975). Students in India held more traditional attitudes regarding obedience of children and chastity than U.S.A. students. Women in India held more traditional beliefs about obedience, whereas men in India held more traditional beliefs about chastity. Interactions between gender and country supported the traditional dominance of the Indian women in the domestic sphere.

Most studies of gender roles in India have emphasized the subordinate roles of women, especially in comparison to the women in the United States. In contrast, the traditional dominant role of Indian women in the domestic aspects of the family has not received as much attention. The woman in India exercises considerable power in family matters in addition to being the sole authority in household tasks (Rao & Rao, 1985) As a mother, she is given higher "esteem" in the family, a greater degree of independence, and the right to have her voice heard in the women's quarters (Mandelbaum, 1970). This status of a mother appears not only to give her the right to make important decisions regarding the family, but also to evoke obedience from her children (Rao & Rao, 1985).

The present study compared the attitudes of college students in the United States and India toward the traditional roles of women, men, and children. Culturally related gender-role behaviors and attitudes are evident in Asian countries, like India, where religion, culture, and tradition have a strong influence in an individual's personality and behavior (Sethi et al., 1984). In contrast, the new family system in the United States and in the Western societies inculcates freedom, independence, equality, and fulfillment (Mace & Mace, 1960). As such, the men's and women's roles in India may not be interchangeable, whereas in the United States it is likely that there is more personal choice involved in expressing one's gender-role behaviors.

Method

The Historic-Socio-Cultural Premises Scale (HSCP), developed by Diaz-Guerrero (1975), was administered to 21 male and 20 female college students in India and to 30 male and 35 female in the U.S.A. Cross-national and gender comparisons of attitudes toward gender and familial roles were made.

Results

Factor Analysis

The 29 items on the HSCP scale were factor analyzed using the principal component method with varimax orthogonal rotation. Nine factors with eigenvalues greater or equal to 1.00 accounted for 64.7% of the total measurement variance. The first two factors, reported here, accounted for 29.3% of the variance and were named obedience of children (factor 1) and female chastity (factor 2). Table 1 represents the factor loadings of .5 or above on these factors.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

A (2 X 2) (gender by country) between subjects ANOVA was performed using the factor scores as dependent variables. A post hoc analysis was performed using Scheffe, $p < .05$.

On factor 1 (obedience of children), there was a main effect for country. Students from India were more traditional in their attitudes than their U.S.A. counterparts, $F(1, 102) = 77.47$, $p < .001$. There was also a significant interaction between gender and country, $F(1, 102) = 7.32$, $p < .01$. The women of both countries took extreme positions as compared to the men with regard to the obedience of

children. The post hoc analysis demonstrated significant differences between the males and females in the U.S.A., $F(1, 63) = 4.75$, $p < .05$. No difference was found between males and females from India.

On factor 2 (female chastity), there was a main effect for country. Students from India were again more traditional than those from the U.S.A., $F(1, 102) = 31.78$, $p < .001$. There was also a significant interaction between gender and country, $F(1, 102) = 6.44$, $p < .05$. The men in India were the most traditional while the men in the U.S.A. were the least traditional (Figure 2). The post hoc analysis demonstrated a significant difference between males and females in India, $F(1, 39) = 4.68$, $p < .05$. There was no significant difference between the responses of U.S.A. males and females.

Discussion

Although students in India, in general, held more traditional views than did students in the United States, the findings also reflected the dominance of Indian women within the domestic sphere in that they demand their children's obedience. These findings are consistent with Mandelbaum's view that the Hindu mother is the pivot of life in the family with reference to decisions regarding the child. A recent study (Singh, 1987) confirms this view that mothers in India value obedient, socially adjusted, conforming, affectionate, refined, courteous, sincere, energetic, persistent, and healthy children. Furthermore, the same study also revealed that both parents prefer traits such as obedience and conformity over independence in thinking.

On the other hand, the difference between men and women in India with regard to female chastity is the most significant finding.

Even though women in India expressed the most traditional views regarding obedience in children, they expressed less traditional values than did men with regard to chastity. This may indeed be a reflection of the gradual changes taking place in Indian society with regard to traditional gender-role attitudes (Ghadially et al., 1980). In a recent study involving mate preferences in 37 cultures by Buss et al. (1990) chastity was reported to be the characteristic on which the cultures varied the most. Respondents from India and other Middle Eastern countries took the more traditional view by placing great importance on chastity, home and children, and domestic skills, while the respondents from Western European countries and the U.S.A., devalued these traditional attributes.

The women in India in this study expressed less traditional views with regard to female chastity than did men. This may be because cultural concerns with female chastity in India have placed the woman in a weak and docile position, while the man in the traditional setting occupies the superior status of the "protector." While this setting is convenient for the Indian male, this would be disadvantageous for the woman. Therefore, it is not surprising that women in this sample actually expressed less traditional and more liberated attitudes with regard to their own status in the society. This finding is different from that of Buss et al. (1990), wherein they reported no significant difference between men and women in India with regard to beliefs about chastity.

There are extreme regional and economic diversities between Northern and Southern India. Also, there are obvious class differences between the rich and the poor; the urban and the rural;

and the educated and the uneducated. The findings of this study were based on the data gathered from college students in South India. In order to be able to generalize to all sections of Indian women, further studies incorporating the above differences would be required.

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Table 1. Structure of Factors

HSCP items	Factor Loadings	
	1	2
Factor 1 : Obedience of Children		
8. Little girls should be seen but not heard	.83	
16. It is more important to respect your father than to love him	.67	
22. Little boys should be seen but not heard.	.80	
23. A man who is not a "real man" dishonors his family.	.61	
29. Small children should be seen but not heard.	.80	
Factor 2: Chastity		
4. A woman should be a virgin until she marries.		.67
5. Young women should not go out alone with men at night.		.70
6. The majority of men like submissive women.		.50
7. All men desire to marry a virgin.		.66
Percentage of common variance accounted for	20.5	8.8

Figure 1. Obedience of children by country and gender

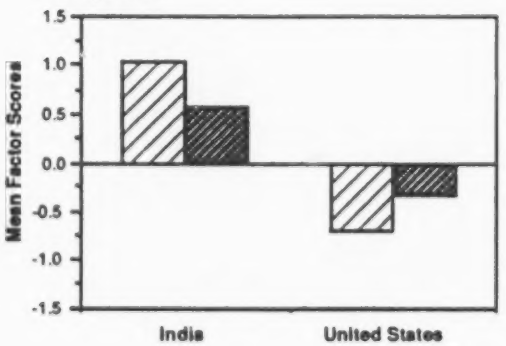

Figure 2. Chastity factor by gender and country